

Families with Teens

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

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Information Series for Parents and Caregivers of Teens

Teens and School Success

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Almost a third of your child's life is spent in school. Other than family, school is the most important influence on your child's life.

One of the best indicators of teens' school performance is whether they feel connected to their schools. Feeling connected means that students have a sense that they belong and feel close to people, including teachers and other adults.

Besides being linked to greater school success, attachment to school is also associated with lower rates of sexual activity, fewer thoughts about or attempts at suicide, lower levels of violent behavior, and reduced alcohol, cigarette, and marijuana use.

Children do better in school and have more positive attitudes about it when their parents are involved in school life. Many parents become less involved with school activities as their children move from elementary to middle school and on to high school. Yet teenagers clearly benefit when their parents show interest. There are many ways in which you can become involved in your child's school. Here are some ways to start:

Communicate with the School. *One of the more important types of parent involvement is communication with your teen's teachers and other school staff such as principals or counselors. Make the family-teacher connection early in the school year and before any problems arise. Take advantage of school open houses or parent-teacher conferences. Ask teachers specific questions about what information are covered, the teacher's expectations for students, what you can do to support both the teacher and your child, and the opportunities you will have for future communication. Build a partnership with teachers so your teen sees you working with teachers, not against them.*

Student Activities. *One way that students become connected and committed to school is by taking part in extracurricular activities. Encourage your child to join school activities. If your teen is already involved, show your support by attending school concerts, games, theater performances, or other events.*

Expect Success. *When parents set high expectations for their children's school performances, teens are more likely to meet those expectations. And when teens work toward their "personal bests" in school, they are less likely to become depressed or involved in harmful violent, sexual, or drug-related behaviors.*

Volunteer in the School. For some parents, volunteering in the school is a way to stay connected. Before volunteering, ask your teen how he or she would feel about your presence in the classroom or an extra-curricular event. Don't be surprised if your teen is not as receptive as he or she was in elementary school. There are many volunteer roles for parents such as: chaperones for field trips; tutors for students who need extra help; timekeepers; ticket-takers; concession stand workers; drivers; serving on committees for special projects; helping to select educational materials; or assisting with budget matters. Other opportunities exist in parent groups such as PTA/PTO, music, or athletic boosters.

Involve Both Parents. Mothers are more likely than fathers to be involved in their children's schools. Children do better when both parents, if possible, are involved. In fact, young people are more likely to get "A's," participate in extracurricular activities, and enjoy school if their fathers participate in their school life.

Encourage Involvement in Leadership Opportunities. Many schools offer programs for older students to serve as tutors to younger children. Mentoring programs are another opportunity for teens to connect with school. Being a "big buddy" to an elementary student may be just the role some youth need to feel valued. Teachers often are interested in having a student assistant who helps in lower level classes and with special class projects.

Remember to set high expectations for school success. Help your teen set reasonable goals and work towards them. Tell teens that you believe in their abilities and that is why you expect success.

Prepared by Kathleen Olson, Family Relations Specialist, 2005.

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For more information on families with teens, check out these resources:

Teen Talk: School Issues - A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #08129
Teen Talk: Youth Choices - A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #08130
Teen Talk: A Survival Guide for Parents of Teenagers, #07938
<http://www.parentingteens.che.umn.edu/TeenTalk.htm>

Thriving With Your Teen, #07752,
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7643.html>

The Growing Season: A Parent's Guide to Positive Parenting of Teens,
#07607 - video/booklet package
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7607.html>

#07776 booklet only
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/DE7776.html>

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